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Home > News > Archives

Tuesday, January 09, 2007

More questions raised about MH/MR building

07/15/2002

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Fayette County Commissioner Vince Vicites, on the facing page, explains his decision to hire Michael Molnar Associates as the architect for the new building for the Mental Health/Mental Retardation office without requesting proposals from other firms.

Initially, we were troubled by this move, as the commissioners have always made a big deal about the need to seek competitive bids and competitive proposals for professional services. It didn't happen in this case during a rush to hire Molnar. Vicites agreed with our criticism yet wanted to explain his reasons. He believes the Health Center Authority would have been stuck with a \$50,000 bill from Molnar for services that are now worthless to the health center.

The background that Vicites offers in how this came about raises even more questions.

The authority initially hired Molnar, the original designer of the building, to explore its deficiencies and design a third floor. MH/MR, which needed the extra space, had secured a \$500,000 grant. By news accounts and Vicites' explanation, Molnar was already deep into this project when Commissioners Sean Cavanagh and Ron Nehls began pushing for a new building. Vicites claimed they even wanted to locate it in a Keystone Opportunity Zone, which is land set aside to entice (through tax forgiveness programs) private industry to invest in Fayette County and create sorely needed jobs.

If this went down as Vicites said, at least the South Union Township supervisors were wise enough to halt this infringement on economic development efforts.

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Instead, a plot owned by the county's redevelopment authority (again land that is supposed to attract private investment) was selected. The commissioners claim it's an undesirable tract but it must be adequate to support new construction. And if it doesn't offer the greatest topography or view, perhaps it could have been offered at a bargain rate to a business looking to expand.

What Vicites hasn't answered, and perhaps Cavanagh or Nehls might care to, is why were plans shifted midstream? Why was a new building necessary?

Here are a few other questions. The initial proposal for the third floor on the health center accomplished a few goals. It gave MH/MR the space it needed. It guaranteed the center would still have this tenant and it took into account the need for about \$200,000 in repairs for the roof.

What happens now? Will the Health Center now have vacant space and struggle with upkeep on less rental income and with a bad roof? Who will pay for these repairs?

Who will pay for the new MH/MR building? For that matter, how much will it cost?

There might be reasonable explanations for this. If so, we sure would appreciate hearing them.

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